

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION:

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 1, line 5, and ending on page 1, line 10, with the following amended paragraph:

This application is a continuation of International Application No. PCT/US00/032746, filed on December 1, 2000, which designates the United States, and a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application No. 09/452,928, filed on December 2, 1999, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application No. 09/072,0279 filed on May 4, 1998, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent No. 5,748,738, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent No. 5,615,268, all by Bisbee et al.

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 55, line 2, and ending on page 55, line 22 (the abstract), with the following amended paragraph:

Exemplary embodiments include methods of handling stored electronic original objects that have been created by signing information objects by respective transfer agents, submitting signed information objects to a trusted custodial utility, validating the submitted signed information objects by at least testing the integrity of the contents of each signed information object and the validity of the signature of the respective transfer agent, and applying to each validated information object a date-time stamp and a digital signature and authentication certificate of the trusted custodial utility. One method includes re-validating an electronic original object by verifying the digital signature of the trusted custodial utility applied to the object and applying to the re-validated object a current date-time stamp and a digital signature and current authentication certificate of the trusted custodial utility. Other methods include handling information objects that are transferable records according to specified business rules.